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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 003277

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STATE FOR U/S KAREN HUGHES, AF/PD

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [SCUL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: SOKOTO: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND PERCEPTIONS

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Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES THOMAS FUREY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B & D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a December 12-15 outreach trip to Sokoto, Country PAO, IRO, and PolOffs paid courtesy visits to Governor Attahiru Bafarawa, Senator Umaru Dahiru, Usman Danfodiyo University Department Heads and Lecturers, and State and privately-funded media. Although most our interlocutors were deeply pessimistic about the Nigerian political situation, the overall welcome for Embassy officers was warm, and the tone positive. In contrast to other Northern outreach attempts conducted over the past six months, Post found Sokoto residents refreshingly receptive and informed, despite criticism. With several proposed collaborative Embassy initiatives in the pipeline, political, religious, and intellectual leaders all say they are looking forward to continued engagement, and, in fact, are lobbying for expanded partnerships in order to deepen USG-Sokoto ties. END SUMMARY.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PRESIDENT, IMPEACHMENT AND COALITIONS

12. (C) On December 13, Country PAO (CPAO), IRO, and PolOffs met with Sokoto State Governor Attahiru Bafarawa at his residence. Gov. Bafarawa discussed the factors which he said led to his successful stewardship of Sokoto over the last seven years. He attributed his ability to pursue an aggressive development agenda in Sokoto to the fact that he assumed office without the financial sponsorship of a "godfather," thus freeing himself up to call his own shots. As a wealthy businessman before assuming office, Bafarawa said this independence was both rare and liberating.

13. (C) Bafarawa also provided insight into the strategy of the Democratic People's Party (DPP) which was preparing for its national convention. (Bafarawa was named the party's presidential candidate on Dec. 20). He suggested that the DPP would only begin negotiations to form a coalition with other parties after its convention. He did not offer a critique of the ruling PDP, of which he is a former member. Nor did he hint at which party the DPP would ally itself with. He did make, however, a strong case for his own record, which forms the basis for his presidential candidacy.

14. (C) Senator Umaru Dahiru, Senate INEC Committee Vice-Chairman, was pessimistic about the current Nigerian political situation. Dahiru told PolOff that from his perch on the INEC Committee, he was convinced that INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu's poor performance was part of a master plan to extend President Obasanjo's tenure. He predicted greater tensions within the country and suggested a coup might be the only way out. He questioned whether the Ambassador's widely quoted statement that a coup would damage the US-Nigeria relations was, in fact, tacit support for the current administration's efforts to extend its tenure.

15. (C) Frustration was so great at the National Assembly, quietly, members had begun informal discussions in early December about impeachment of the president. The discussion was substantive but preliminary, Dahiru said. Much of the talk surrounded strategy and implications. Impeachment had resurfaced, he said, because after the PDP primaries, there was now a coalition of disgruntled ruling party members willing to get revenge for way the party discarded them. After word of the discussion leaked out, the President, Dahiru claimed, sent hundreds of military and police officers to set up roadblocks and surround the rural house of Senate President's Ken Nnamani. Dahiru claimed that the deployment was a clear attempt to intimidate the Senate President, but that talk about impeachment was likely to continue.

ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY: POLITICS OF A "MODERN" SULTAN

16. (C) PolOffs met December 13 with Usman Danfodiyo academics, Associate Professor Ibrahim Malumfashi and History Department Head Aminu Isyaku Yandaki, to discuss 2007 elections and the reception of the new Sultan - successor to his deceased brother, Muhammadu Maccido, killed in the October 29 ADC plane crash.

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17. (C) Professor Malumfashi noted that Sultan Muhammadu Sa'adu Abubakar, Sokoto's 20th Sultan and Head of the Nigerian National Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (an organization responsible for determining such contentious, divisive occasions as the moon-sighting), was being well received across the country. (NOTE: Despite consternation from Yoruba Muslims in years past, the Sultan must always be a Northern Hausa-Fulani. Many Yoruba Muslims believe the selection process marginalizes their community, consequently deeming irrelevant the Sultanate and its religious directives. The positive reception surrounding Abubakar's selection is viewed as a sign of national unity. END NOTE.)

18. (C) Professor Yandaki labeled the Sultan "more modern" given his young age (53 years old), military career, and extensive travel abroad. As an Army Major General, who served under General Ibrahim Babangida in the late 1980s and who has spent most of his career in hotspots in Africa and South Asia - most recently serving as Military Attache to Pakistan and Afghanistan - Abubakar enjoys widespread credibility and renown. Professor Malumfashi suggested that the Sultan's international ties, particularly to the Middle East and Pakistan, may figure prominently during his tenure.

19. (C) Yandaki also said that it is likely that the Sultan will use his position to influence the Nigerian political landscape - in spite of the fact that the Sultanate is theoretically neutral. Although Yandaki predicted this would commence with the 2007 elections, he did not give an indication of which candidate the Sultan would support or how he would communicate his preference to the electorate. Yandaki predicted that the Sultan would operate "behind the scenes," at least for next year's election.

110. (C) In order to quickly establish credibility, the

Sultan has been on the road meeting with his constituents since assuming post on November 2. His current priority project, as Head of the Nigerian Hajj Commission (Amir ul-Hajj), is to reverse the ineptitude which has characterized the Nigerian Government's annual efforts to airlift Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. Unlike last year, when Deputy Senate President Ibrahim Mantu led the Nigerian Government's efforts, there have been few complaints about disorganization or mismanagement. This, Yandaki said, indicates that the new Sultan is a man of action.

UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA OUTREACH

¶11. (U) On December 13, PolOffs delivered lectures at Usman Danfodiyo University. The overwhelmingly positive reaction to the talks "Democratization Trends in Africa" and "The Legacy of Nana Asma'u: Lessons for Today" (Nana Asam'u was the daughter of Sokoto's first Sultan, Usman Dan Fodio who consolidated the Fulani and Hausa States through jihad in 1804) given at the Department of Political Science and the Department of Islamic Studies respectively indicated the great interest in and appreciation for American engagement in addressing issues pertinent to Nigeria. Audience members, including Department faculty and graduate students, discussed Nigerian views of the U.S., USG policy in Iraq and the Middle East, and the practice of Islam and role of women in America.

Explaining her University lecture on Nana Asma'u as well as Muslim life in America, PolOff gave interviews with Sokoto State-run RIMA TV/Radio and PATH Newspaper, which published the interview in both English and Hausa. RIMA TV featured PolOff's remarks on its popular weekend show, "Newsmakers".

¶12. (C) In a lecture on "Democratization Trends in Africa," a dozen senior professors from the Faculty of Social Sciences actively engaged in discussion of relevant trends. After a brief critique by one professor of the applicability of democracy to Africa, the discussion shifted to the strengths and weaknesses of Nigeria's democratic experiment. Most professors expressed pessimism about the current administration, highlighting a lack of tangible results. There was a consensus among the professors that the 2007 elections preparations had not inspired confidence, with

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several suggesting a radical approach was needed.

CANDID CONVERSATION

¶13. (C) Country PAO, accompanied by IRO and PolOffs, hosted on December 14 a reception for prominent leaders in Sokoto's Muslim community. Guests included former Fulbright and International Visitor Program grantees as well as Usman Danfodiyo University Vice Chancellor, University Librarian, American Corner Coordinator, Department Heads and Professors, Rima TV General Manager, and Secretary of Sultan Muhammadu Sa'adu Abubakar. The event's informal tenor allowed for candid discussion on Nigerian views of the U.S. and American foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. Attendees used the occasion to suggest that USG "inaction or unwillingness" to broker a peace deal between the Israelis and Palestinians bred anti-American sentiment and terrorism in the world, emphasizing that "without resolving the Middle East crisis, the U.S. will not be safe".

COMMENT: REFRESHINGLY RECEPTIVE, INFORMED

¶14. (C) In marked contrast to other Northern Nigeria outreach attempts conducted over the past six months, this trip to Sokoto was surprisingly refreshing. Although

individuals appeared critical of USG actions in Iraq and the Middle East, interlocutors were receptive, calm, and fully engaged in and desirous for constructive dialogue. With respect to the University lectures, while most audience information about the U.S. had been gleaned from electronic media, rather than through travel to the U.S. or interaction with Americans, individuals appeared well-versed in American politics and civic life indicating that neither their geographic remoteness in Northwestern Nigeria nor limited resources precluded them from acquiring accurate information about the U.S. The oftentimes outrageous conspiratorial claims and hostile reception Post has encountered in other travels throughout the North were conspicuously absent in Sokoto. While the reasons under-girding this seeming discrepancy remain elusive, it is clear that most anti-American rhetoric in Northern Nigeria emanates either from individuals, whose anti-American sentiment is showcased at Friday sermons, or from poorly-produced, though widely available pamphlets imported from places such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt - all the while, aggravated by poor development indicators. END COMMENT.

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